

THE ACCUSING FOOTSTEPS

By Mary Lloyd Evans.

Always the footsteps behind me, dull, hollow, but echoing—never before. Did they but precede I might have had hope, for then they might



My Manhood Cowered. Hatred, Cowardice, Guilt Held Me Spellbound.

guide me to some haven of rest, peace for my tired heart.

I was not a wicked man, nor a mean man, nor a dissipated man. I was only a murderer—to the world never that, but to my conscience, yes. A thousand deaths were in my heart and one poor victory—if I could call it that.

"I consent to the marriage."

"Secret, of course?"

"Must be that way under the circumstances."

Burned into my brain were these three sentences, for they started the train of circumstances that resulted in a terrible tragedy.

It was six weeks since that I overheard Huldah Evans speak the first, Vane Telford made reply. Then her final words—"my love, my adored one!" She whom I worshiped was a party to a clandestine complication with a rival I had never feared, nor before that even suspected.

He had come to the village, a stranger. He had made several calls on Huldah. I was curious, but she never apprised me as to the personality of her new acquaintance nor his motive in visiting her. That vividly remembered afternoon I was lining a high hedge, surrounding the Evans place when I heard the brief colloquy noted. I had come to the spot with my heart full of hope and love. I left it vengeful, embittered, my soul immersed in the blackest despair.

I wandered towards the narrow but deep rolling stream at the edge of the town, my spirit dazed, my heart distracted. This, then, was the end of it all. She loved another! I flung myself on the grassy bank, watching the swift eddies just above the waterfall. It was an unfrequented spot for the present, for the old foot bridge had been condemned, as everybody regular townsmen knew, a new structure being proposed, and the roadway on either side of the stream was blockaded some distance back. There signs were up, warning the pedestrian of peril.

I sat in a daze, staring blankly at the rushing waters, madly tempted to plunge beneath their surface and end all my misery. It was getting on toward dusk when a sharp, cheery whistle attracted my attention.

There, not fifty yards distant, was Telford. He was warbling a careless carol, swinging along like a man in love with life, as if he had just heard some joyful news.

In a flash I pictured the situation. He, my hated rival, was beloved by